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UDK: 005.95/96:331.4

Review article

DOI: 10.5937/ptp2302112S

Received: 01.03.2023.

Approved on: 13.05.2023.

Pages: 112–123

STRATEGIES RELEVANT FOR POSITIONING THE ORGANIZATION AS THE EMPLOYER OF A CHOICE – A CASE STUDY OF PWC

ABSTRACT: Research has demonstrated that a strong employer brand has a significant positive impact on the organization, including an influence on talent attraction and retention, gaining a competitive advantage by building a positive impact in public and enhancement of the employee engagement and consequently organizational performance. The purpose of this paper is to support organizations in developing a structural approach towards building an employer brand in order to attract, engage and retain the best employees and thus increase their performance. The paper will present the existing research regarding the employer branding strategies and via a case study analyse the practical implication these strategies have. A case study included a qualitative research done on PwC, a consulting and audit company operating on Serbian market. The study utilized the structured interviews in order to analyse the starting position of the organization, the challenges it was facing, and the desirable outcomes. The interviews also examined the strategies and actions taken to achieve these outcomes, as well as the results of the process. The results of the study demonstrated that the impact the strategies had was positive. But, what proved to be lacking was the structural approach towards the strategy implementation

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as well as clear measurements of the impact the strategies had on the overall organizational performance.

Keywords: *employer branding, branding strategy, organizational reputation, human resource management.*

1. Introduction

Being perceived as an employer of choice is critical for organizations because it can have a significant impact on their ability to attract and retain top talent (Sančanin, 2021). According to a study by the Society for Human Resource Management, organizations that are perceived as desirable places to work are more likely to attract job candidates who are highly qualified and motivated (Society for Human Resource Management [SHRM], 2018). This can help organizations build a strong and effective workforce, which can in turn lead to improved performance and competitiveness.

In addition to attracting top talent, being seen as an employer of choice can also help organizations build a positive reputation within their industry and among the general public. A strong employer brand can impact customer loyalty increase and positive reputationon the market (Dahling, Chau & Qi, 2017). This can be particularly important in today's highly competitive business environment, where organizations need to differentiate themselves in order to succeed.

Employer branding is the process of promoting an organization's reputation as a desirable place to work. This can be achieved through a variety of means, such as promoting the organization's culture and values, offering competitive benefits and perks, and highlighting opportunities for career growth and development (Siggelkow, 2002; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). By effectively promoting its employer brand, an organization can differentiate itself from its competitors and position itself as an employer of choice (Barjaktarović, 2022).

In conclusion, being seen as an employer of choice is important for organizations because it can help them attract and retain top talent, build a positive reputation, and differentiate themselves in the competitive job market. Employer branding is a key aspect of positioning an organization as an employer of choice, and there are multiple actions that can be taken to achieve it. This paper aims to review the existing research on employer branding and strategies for positioning an organization as a desirable employer, and provide examples of how these strategies can be applied in practice.

2. Factors influencing organization's attractiveness

There are various factors that contribute to an organization's attractiveness as an employer. These can include the organization's culture and values, benefits and perks, opportunities for career growth and development, and work-life balance (Dahling et al., 2017). Research has also shown that an organization's reputation and image in the community can influence its attractiveness as an employer (Barjaktarović, 2022). Furthermore, challenging and meaningful tasks, as well as supportive management style, can enhance an organization's attractiveness as an employer (Cameron, Bright & Caza, 2016). Finally, organizations that effectively communicate their value proposition to potential employees can also increase their (Rounak & Misra, 2020; Ariyanto & Kustini, 2021).

Employer branding plays a significant role in attracting and retaining top talent. Research has shown that organizations with a strong employer brand are more likely to attract and retain top talent, leading to improved performance and competitiveness (Dahling et al., 2017; SHRM, 2018; Tanwar & Prasad, 2016).

Effective employer branding can also help organizations build a positive reputation in their industry and among the general public, which can further enhance their ability to attract and retain top talent (Lukić, Brkljač & Perčić, 2019; Gupta, Mittal & Mittal, 2019). However, it is important for organizations to consistently deliver on their employer brand promises in order to maintain their attractiveness as an employer and retain top talent (Carlini, Grace, France & Iacono, 2019).

Research has shown that employer branding can have a significant impact on employee engagement and performance. A strong employer brand can lead to increased employee satisfaction and commitment, leading to improved performance and retention (Dahling et al., 2017; SHRM, 2018). In addition, research has demonstrated that a positive employer brand can lead to increased customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth promotion (Benraïss-Noailles & Viot, 2021), which can further enhance organizational performance.

On the other hand, a weak employer brand can lead to decreased employee engagement and performance, as well as increased turnover (Dahling et al., 2017). Therefore, it is important for organizations to effectively promote their employer brand and consistently deliver on their employer brand promises in order to enhance employee engagement and performance.

3. Strategies for positioning as a desirable employer

There are several strategies that organizations can use to position themselves as desirable employers. Some strategies include:

- Offering competitive compensation and benefits: Employees are more likely to be attracted to organizations that offer competitive salaries, benefits packages, and opportunities for career advancement (Edwards, 2010).
- Promoting a positive work culture: Organizations that have a positive work culture, where employees feel valued and supported, are more likely to attract and retain top talent (Linn, 2014; Tumasjan, Kunze, Bruch & Welpe, 2020).
- Providing professional development opportunities: Employees are often drawn to organizations that provide opportunities for professional growth and development. This could include trainings, mentorships, and the opportunity for new responsibilities and on the job learning (Wallace, Lings, Cameron & Sheldon, 2014).
- Communicating the company's values and mission: Employees are often attracted to organizations that align with their personal values and beliefs. By clearly communicating the company's mission and values, organizations can attract employees who are passionate about the work they do (Edwards, 2010).
- Building a strong employer brand: Organizations can establish themselves as desirable employers by building a strong employer brand that reflects their culture, values, and mission. This can be done through numerous marketing activities utilizing social media, adequate job postings, and using employee referrals (Sivertzen, Nilsen & Olafsen, 2013).

One example of an organization that has effectively positioned itself as an employer of choice is Google. Google is known for its innovative and collaborative culture, as well as its generous benefits and perks, such as on-site gym facilities, health insurance, and free meals (Google, 2021). In addition, Google offers a number of opportunities for career growth and development, including training and development programs and career advancement opportunities (Google, 2021). By promoting its culture and values, offering competitive benefits and perks, and highlighting opportunities for career growth, Google has effectively positioned itself as an employer of choice and attracted top talent from around the world (Mouton & Bussin, 2019). This article will review all these strategies on an example of a consulting company operating on Serbian market.

4. Case Study Description – PwC (PricewaterhouseCoopers)

PwC (PricewaterhouseCoopers) is a global professional services firm with headquarters in London, UK. The firm offers a wide range of services including audit and assurance, consulting, deals and forensics, and tax and legal services to clients in various industries including technology, financial services, consumer, and energy and utilities. PwC has a network of member firms in over 150 countries and employs over 250,000 people worldwide. In addition to its traditional services, PwC also focuses on emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and blockchain and has a strong commitment to sustainability and corporate social responsibility (PwC, 2022).

PwC Serbia is a member firm of the PwC global network and is headquartered in Belgrade, Serbia. The firm offers a range of professional services including audit and assurance, consulting, tax and legal, and deals services to clients in various industries including financial services, telecommunications, and energy and utilities. PwC Serbia has a team of over 200 professionals who are committed to delivering high-quality services to their clients and helping them solve complex business challenges. In addition to its traditional services, PwC Serbia also focuses on emerging technologies and has a strong commitment to sustainability and corporate social responsibility (PwC Serbia, 2022).

5. Practical implication of implementation of strategies for positioning as a desirable employer

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the practical implications of strategies for positioning an organization as a desirable employer, a qualitative research study was conducted. The study utilized structured interviews to analyse the starting position of the organization, the challenges it was facing, and the desirable outcomes that were desired. The interviews also examined the strategies and actions taken to achieve these outcomes, as well as the results of the process. The interviews were conducted with HR representatives and internal focus groups that were specifically formed for the development and implementation of the employer brand strategy.

The interviews focused on two aspects – the process of strategy design (Fuertes et al., 2020), and the quality and effectiveness of the strategy that is in place. From the perspective of the strategy design (Gardašević & Radić, 2020) the following steps were discussed:

1. Analysis of the current state;

2. Setting goals and targets;
3. Strategies and actions;
4. Results.

From the strategy quality perspective, the following elements relevant for the development of an impactful employer branding strategy were discussed:

- Offering competitive compensation and benefits;
- Promoting a positive work culture;
- Providing professional development opportunities;
- Communicating the company's values and mission;
- Building a strong employer brand.

Analysis of the current state

The design of an employer branding strategy was initiated at the regional level and included participation from all territories within the region. To understand the strengths and weaknesses of the brand in each territory, a questionnaire was distributed to all territories. In addition to this structured analysis, the company also gathered empirical data from various sources, including employment fairs, candidates in the selection process, and internal employee satisfaction surveys. This information was used to identify key feedback from the market.

Results: In comparison to the direct competitors the company has a positive reputation and is perceived as a most desirable employer. The company is perceived as a organization with a steep learning curve and with wide learning opportunities. Nevertheless, in comparison to other competitors from similar industries the company is perceived as too formal, the work life balance is not appropriate, the selection process is perceived as complicated and long lasting, and it was noticed there is a discrepancy between global and local employer branding strategy. One of the key inputs was that the new generation of workforce is not motivated to apply for the entry level jobs as they perceived them as too operative and monotonous.

Setting goals and targets

The analysis conducted in the first stage resulted in a set of priorities that should be addressed:

- How to adjust business to suit the needs of the new generation workforce
- How to strengthen the local brand and its characteristics.

No clear goals were set nor KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) to track the strategy successfulness (Merkus, Willems & Veenwijk, 2019). Turnover and recruitment funnel was identified as a potential measuring tool though the goals were not set. The same applies to the social media channels and website engagements.

Strategies and actions

The priority was addressed with a strategy that should result in making the company more attractive for the new generation workforce by introducing Flexible internships – a new type of entry level positions. In comparisons to the standard entry level positions where the employee was trained to perform operative activities and learning curve took two years for the employee to move to a coordinator and controller roles, the new position was focused on a strong and structured learning experience where an employee would be able to gain the same skills that took previously two years in just three months. The challenge was that still the operative job had to be done. This was solved by introducing automatization solutions and share service centres that support the operative activities. Beside the steep learning curve flexible internships were also designed to be able to suit the people who are still studying, with the idea that even during their studies they get a professional experience within the company so after the graduation when moving to the full time employment they are already familiar with the operations from the company and are able to progress faster.

Actions targeting other aspects that support employer branding strategy:

Offering competitive compensation and benefits – The company is conducting a salary survey to benchmark the salaries in comparison to the market. The results of the survey are used to adjust the compensation packages. In accordance with empirical understanding of the market the benefits package is attractive and constantly improved to suit the market requirements.

Promoting a positive work culture – The company is focused on communicating the flexible and informal working environment. Flexibility is presented in flexible working hours, opportunity to work from home and an environment where the results are valued. Social medias and employment fairs are utilized to present the informal approach toward communication and a friendly working environment where individuals are respected and appreciated.

Providing professional development opportunities – The company is perceived as an organization with strong learning opportunities. Beside

learning on the job that is intensive there are opportunities to develop through internal trainings and e-larnings.

Communicating the company's values and mission – The branding strategy is not strongly focused on communication company's mission and values. This is done through internal communication.

Building a strong employer brand– The key communication channels include social media networks, website and employment fairs. The focus is on building positive working environment for employees to become positive promoters as well as external communication to the market. Employees are members of different professional organizations and conferences to position themselves and the company as the market experts.

Results

As there were no clear targets set it is difficult to assess the results of the strategies described above. The company perception is positive, and they are concluding that the strategies and working toward a more positive employer brand. During the process of the internal workforce planning a target was set that 15 people should be hired on flexible internship positions. In total 19 people received the offer and 17 accepted it.

6. Relevance of implementation of employer branding strategies

Employer branding is a crucial aspect of an organization, especially when the company is providing high-quality professional services. This is because workforce quality is one of the key elements in achieving organizational goals and targets (Schneider et al., 2018). Employer branding strategies and activities aim to improve employee satisfaction, align the organization with workforce needs, and communicate the company's brand to the wider market.

In terms of strategy design theory and practice, there is potential for further development of a more structured approach to strategy creation that includes clear goals and targets for tracking strategy execution (Fuentes et al., 2020). However, according to a company representative, this may be challenging due to the difficulty in measuring such activities and finding internal or external benchmarks for comparison, as both the internal and external environments are dynamic (Lin et al., 2020).

It is worth noting that the limitations of this study include the fact that the information was collected only from internal sources, although it does include external perspectives that the company has gathered. For future studies, it is recommended that external analysis is also conducted.

7. Conclusion

As the result of our research, being perceived as an employer of choice is a critical factor to the organizational success. This conclusion aligns with previous research conducted by Sančanin (2021), which found that an organization's reputation on the workforce market can significantly impact the quality and retention of its talent. In order to build and maintain a positive image on the labour market, the company in question has implemented various strategies and actions, including offering a supportive work-life balance, opportunities for growth and development, and a comprehensive compensation and benefits package (Dahling et al., 2017).

However, a question that remains is how to accurately measure and track the impact of these strategies on the organization's reputation and ultimately its results. It is important for the company to have a way to assess the effectiveness of these efforts to continually improve and attract top talent. Further research could be conducted to explore potential methods for measuring and tracking the impact of employer branding efforts on organizational success.

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STRATEGIJE ZA POZICIONIRANJE ORGANIZACIJE KAO POŽELJNOG POSLODAVCA – STUDIJA SLUČAJA PWC

REZIME: Istraživanja su pokazala da snažan brand poslodavca ima značajan pozitivan uticaj na organizaciju, uključujući uticaj na privlačenje i zadržavanje talenata, sticanje konkurentske prednosti izgradnjom pozitivnog uticaja u javnosti i povećanje angažovanja zaposlenih i posledično organizacionog učinka. Svrha ovog rada je da podrži organizacije u

razvoju strukturalnog pristupa ka izgradnji brenda poslodavca kako bi privukli, angažovali i zadržali najbolje zaposlene i shodno tome povećali organizacioni učinak. Rad će predstaviti postojeća istraživanja u vezi sa strategijama brendiranja poslodavaca i kroz studiju slučaja analizirati praktične implikacije koje ove strategije imaju. Studija slučaja je obuhvatila kvalitativno istraživanje konsultantske i revizorske kuće PwC-a, koja posluje na srpskom tržištu. Kroz studiju koriste se strukturirani intervjuvi kako bi se analizirala početna pozicija organizacije, izazovi sa kojima se suočava i željeni rezultati. Intervjuvi su takođe ispitivali strategije i akcije preduzete da bi se postigli ovi ishodi, kao i rezultati procesa. Rezultati studije su pokazali da je uticaj strategija pozitivan, ono što se pokazalo nedostatkom jeste strukturalni pristup implementaciji strategije, kao i jasna merenja uticaja koje strategije imaju na ukupan organizacioni učinak.

Ključne reči: brendiranje poslodavca, strategija brendiranja, reputacija organizacije, upravljanje ljudskim resursima.

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